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Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<u>RAISED H.B. 5415</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING THE AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL	Support
<u>RAISED H.B. 5419</u> : AN ACT CONCERNING THE PRESERVATION OF THE SAVIN FARM IN LEBANON.	Support

Co-Chairs Meyer, Gentile and Members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first conservation organization established in Connecticut (1895). CFPA has offered testimony before the Legislature on issues such as sustainable forestry, state parks and forests, trail recreation, natural resource protection, and land conservation for over 115 years.

Today, I am here to testify in support of Raised Bills 5415 and 5419.

5415

The Air Line Trail, which is also a State Park, is one of Connecticut's greatest recreational resources. It is a greenway, a rail-trail, and has a tremendous history. I thank the Committee for your proposal to make its protection a priority for the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. I should add, though, that eminent domain is an authority that may send a signal that is too strong, and may wind up alienating the neighbors to the trail who may be inclined to be supportive of its protection. In a similar way, a couple of years ago, a bill proposed by this Committee to preserve the New England National Scenic Trail was an excellent idea and greatly appreciated, but at the time we asked to have the eminent domain authority removed. We have found that to be successful, we must work cooperatively with the many private landowners who support and allow free access to trails. Eminent domain authority can lead to mistrust of government and detract from the momentum that is being built along the Air Line State Park Trail. We strongly support this bill, and respectfully ask that you remove the eminent domain authority before it is voted upon by the Environment Committee.

5419

The 575-acre Savin Farm should be preserved for its agricultural values and uses. In 2010, the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board conducted a study of state-owned farmland, and identified a number of properties worthy of protection. Lebanon's Savin Farm was identified for protection in this report alongside the farmland at Southbury Training School, as well as five other state-held agricultural properties. The Savin Farm was ranked as exceptional due to its high percentage of prime farmland soils and its location in a vibrant agricultural community.

Although this property is under the care and control of the Department of Agriculture, it is vulnerable to being sold, traded, given away, or having its future use changed without a legal instrument such as a conservation easement being placed on it which this bill would wisely authorize.

I would be glad to respond to any questions you may have.